

Information *Brief*

Addressing Trends and Developments in Secondary Education
and Transition



National Center on Secondary Education and Transition

Creating Opportunities for Youth
With Disabilities to Achieve
Successful Futures

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Models of Collaboration and Cost Sharing in Transition Programming

By Joe Timmons

Introduction

Most funding for state and local transition programs that serve youth with disabilities depends on the authority of three federal laws—the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Title I of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), and the Vocational Rehabilitation Act, found under Title IV of WIA. Because these three laws provide funding from separate federal agencies, states have various structures for providing related services (Timmons, 2004). This separation of funds and programs has often led to schools and human service agencies that serve individuals with disabilities functioning in isolation or from uncoordinated agendas (Crane, Gramlich, & Peterson, 2004).

Fortunately, many state and local educational and human service organizations, with encouragement from federal funding agencies, are forming partnerships that seek to coordinate agendas and collaborate with as many stakeholder groups as possible. To be successful and sustaining, these collaborations must be able to work together, share resources, and find creative and flexible ways to fund programs and share the financial burden.

This brief describes two funding tools that are increasingly used in collaborative relationships. Both blended funding and braided funding pool financial resources to maximize outcomes. These tools can be instrumental in maintaining and sustaining effective relationships in transition programming.

Collaboration as a Foundation for Cost Sharing

Successful pooling of resources relies on solid collaborative partnerships. According to deFur (1999), groups form strong partnerships by engaging in four increasingly complex activities—networking, coordination of services, cooperation, and finally, collaboration. Collaborative groups, because of formal relationships, often enter into written contracts—called interagency agreements—that are designed to maximize resources for transitioning youth (Crane et al., 2004).

These agreements delineate agencies' duties and funding responsibilities. Many states have existing interagency transition teams—for example, in Minnesota, the state legislature has put in place the Minnesota System of In-

teragency Coordination whose role is “to encourage partnerships among groups serving youth with disabilities from birth to young adulthood” (Timmons, Podmostko, Bremer, Lavin, & Wills, 2004).

Deciding how to fund activities after initiating collaborations can be a complex and difficult task. Personnel issues, bureaucratic barriers, and agency priorities can preclude decisions about funding that best serve the youth of a given community.

Blending and Braiding Defined

With collaborative partnerships in place, the possibility emerges for greater creativity in the use of funding. The Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law has defined the terms “blending” and “braiding” as they are used in federal programs. While its focus is on younger children in the mental health system, the center’s descriptions can apply to any human service or educational partnership. According to Koyanagi et al. (2003):

- Blended funding pools have been used for many years; the concept of braiding funding is newer.
- Both approaches combine funds from different federal agencies or programs into a single funding stream so they can be used more easily at the point of service delivery.
- Blended funding is the use of financial resources that are combined into a single pool from which they can be allocated to providers.
- Braided funding is the use of financial resources from various sources to pay for a service package for an individual, with tracking and accountability for each resource maintained at the administrative level. The funds remain in separate strands but are joined at the end of the “braid.”

Blended funding is generally more formal in nature and usually requires written agreements, contracts, or permissions from higher level administrators. Additionally, accounting practices and administrative issues must be considered and their costs included in the blending. These agreements may be made at the local or state level and involve government agencies, school districts, and/or non-profit organizations. Generally, the more partners in the collaboration, the more complicated the process for forming the pool. Committed funds usually stay in the pool for the length of the agreement (typically

Suggested activities when forming collaborative partnerships:

- Identify current services, programs, and funding sources provided within the community for secondary- and postsecondary-aged youth with disabilities and their families;
- Facilitate the development of multiagency teams to address present and future transition needs of students in their IEPs;
- Develop a community plan to include mission, goals and objectives, and an implementation strategy to assure that transition needs of individuals with disabilities are met;
- Recommend changes or improvements of transition services within the community system;
- Exchange agency information such as appropriate data, effectiveness studies, special projects, exemplary programs, and creative funding of programs; and
- Prepare an annual summary assessing the progress of transition services in the community, including information about postschool outcomes for individuals with disabilities who were provided transition services.

Recommended activities when contemplating pooling financial resources:

- Have a clear vision of the programs stakeholders are trying to finance;
- Engage in collaborative planning across agencies and with families;
- Understand the timeline, recipients’ needs, and reporting requirements for the use of federal funds;
- Create a funding strategy that merges and maximizes different funding sources—federal and other—so that participant needs drive agency decisions on which services to provide;
- Focus on outcomes but recognize the need for accountability—in particular, cost-accounting must be rigorous to demonstrate how program requirements are being met by tracking, documenting, and accounting for funds as well as demonstrating outcomes;
- Possess a data infrastructure that can provide the essential information needed to ensure accountability; and
- Provide training and cross-training of staff (Koyanagi, Boudreaux, & Lind, 2003).

one year) and can be renewed annually if parties agree, and outcomes warrant it.

Braided funding can be less formal and conducted at the local level with fewer administrative barriers. In the community setting, it appears easier for organizations to utilize braided funding but, because it is less formal, it can be more difficult to sustain without strong commitments from partners.

Blended Funding— Oregon Youth Transition Program

In response to a serious need for higher quality transition outcomes for youth with significant disabilities in 1990, the Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation Division (OVRD), the Oregon Department of Education, and the University of Oregon joined together and sought federal funding to help local school districts become more effective. Upon receipt of a U.S. Department of Education grant, these agencies established the Oregon Youth Transition Program (YTP), now in its 16th year.

Because there was no formal link between schools and OVRD, these groups formed an innovative partnership where none existed before (Oregon Youth Transition Program, 2001). This partnership called for more extensive services based on four specific objectives:

- Individualized planning focused on postschool goals and self-determination, including better coordination with relevant community organizations;
- Academic, vocational, independent-living, and personal-social skills instruction designed to increase graduation rates;
- Paid job training with appropriate placement assistance; and
- Follow-up support for a year after leaving the program.

Today, these objectives are commonly found in transition programs across the country. In 1990, they were atypical—especially when one considers the organizational and financial collaboration that supported them.

At the state level, professionals in Oregon identified the need for more extensive services in the schools—the kind most often provided by vocational rehabilitation professionals to adults and older youth

who are out of school. Its new model called for rehabilitation services to start while an individual was still in school, and for personnel from OVRD and the local school to work together to provide services that met the four objectives. Specifically, special education teachers and educational assistants received training with VRD staff, and then teams were formed to lead individualized transition programs for small groups of students. Vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors had dedicated caseloads working with youth, and the educational assistants became community-based transition specialists, spending time both in the school and in the community—novel ideas in 1990.

The University of Oregon's College of Education provided training and ongoing technical assistance to all parties in the project, and university staff coordinated the development of a program training manual and other materials. Their involvement continues and is considered to be a key component in sustaining this program. Currently, 1.5 full-time university staff are included in the project budget.

Creative and flexible funding for the project has been an important part of its success. With federal funding for VR and special education programs often in flux, program leaders were determined to share the fiscal responsibility and to respond to changes in agencies' abilities to contribute.

Performance based contracts have been negotiated between OVRD and the local educational agencies (LEA) with the LEAs generating the matching funds that OVRD drew down from the federal allotment. Each LEA assigns school staff to the project and administers the pooled funds that pay for the community-based transition specialists. Currently, 120 Oregon high schools are participating and to date, 8000 students have gained access to OVRD (M. Johnson, personal communication, July 1, 2004 and December 6, 2006).

Braided Funding— Massachusetts' Community-Based Employment Services Program

The state of Massachusetts developed a Community-Based Employment Services Program (CBES) in 1999. This collaborative program was designed for older youth with significant disabilities to have access to postsecondary education and employment

opportunities while remaining a student in their local school districts. The program combines an interagency partnership of adult-service agencies with high school-based youth support teams to “develop a new individual support model of collaborative funding for transition-aged youth” (Hart, Zimbrich, & Ghiloni, 2001, p. 145).

Partner providers “qualify” to participate and agree to performance-based activities that assist participants to “to choose, obtain, and maintain employment in integrated work environments, based on individual choices, interests, skills, and needs” (Hart et al., 2001, p. 148). The CBES program provides a framework for LEAs, adult-service agencies, and service providers

to share expertise, problem-solve, coordinate services and supports, reduce duplication of services, and maximize limited resources. This framework included ample cross-agency planning to overcome barriers that historically prevented cooperation.

The CBES model is designed to work specifically with youth who have disabilities and who are in the final stages of secondary education. In an LEA, partners form transition support teams that meet with individuals and their families to make detailed plans for the transition to work and/or postsecondary education. In these meetings, partners commit to short- and long-term funding for services for the individual. The braid model takes these separate strands and weaves them into a single service plan. A typical plan in this model might include assessment services and tuition waivers to a community college picked up by vocational rehabilitation, fees and books paid for by the Department of Mental Retardation, and job coaching and transportation paid for by the school district. After postsecondary schooling is completed, longer-term supports can be added to the plan, and additional braided funding may be added (D. Hart, personal communication, July 21, 2004).

Prior to formulating individual plans, partners agree on budgetary limits, the number of students who will be served, and the kinds of services funded (D. Hart, personal communication, July 21, 2004). The teams then create menus of services and supports that can be provided and selected by the individual with family input. Menu items focus on assessment, placement, initial employment supports, and extended supports. When a provider achieves specified benchmarks, payment is made. This system has shown significant improvements in “effectiveness, efficiency, consumer satisfaction, and provider satisfaction with the implementation of the outcome-based employment services” (Hart et al., 2001, p. 148).

Challenges

Blending and braiding funds may look simple, but the groundwork to pool or combine financial resources takes time and strong leadership. Unanticipated events are the norm rather than the exception. Personnel changes can easily transform the dynamics of a group, and plans must be in place to sustain the program if a critical member leaves the partnership.

Using the Memorandum of Agreement

Any collaborative efforts require concurrence or agreement on the duties and financial responsibilities of participating partners. Often, a written document called a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) is used to formally document the details of the collaboration. An MOA can be an agreement between government agencies, schools, community based organizations, individual vendors, and/or for profit businesses. An MOA can also be referred to as a Memorandum of Understanding.

To see how some groups have formalized their collaborative efforts, visit these Web sites.

- Memorandum of Understanding Concerning Cooperation and Collaboration in Providing Services to Students with Disabilities Ages 14-21 in North Dakota: <http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/transitn/undrstnd.pdf> (17 KB, 4 pp)
- Memorandum of Agreement Between the New York State Office of Mental Health and the State Education Department Regarding Cooperative Efforts to Improve Access and Delivery of Services to Persons Diagnosed with a Mental Illness: <http://www.vesid.nysed.gov/specialed/transition/iaomh.htm>
- Memorandum of Agreement to Provide Services to Individuals who are Deaf/Blind (New York State): <http://www.vesid.nysed.gov/publications/mous/nov99.htm>

All links retrieved January 8, 2007.

Agency funding cycles and priorities vary from year to year, and financial commitments may fluctuate.

With increasingly tight financial resources, transition programs must continue to be aggressive, creative, and flexible in how they fund and provide services. Data infrastructure and accountability are key components to supporting ongoing funding. Inherently, collaboration entails abandoning old procedures and cooperating with others to best serve the youth in need. Demonstrating program effectiveness is the best guarantee that programs will continue to be funded.

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Resources

To learn more about the **Oregon Youth Transition Program**, contact Michael D. Johnson, College of Education, 5261 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403-5261 or dudley@uoregon.edu

To learn more about the **Community-Based Employment Services Program**, contact Debra Hart, Institute for Community Inclusion (UCE), University of Massachusetts, Boston, 100 Morrissey Blvd., Boston, MA 02125 or debra.hart@umb.edu

Also:

Developing an Interagency Structure for Local Coordination of Services: Governance Manual is available at <http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/groups/SpecialEd/documents/Manual/002441.pdf>

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